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THE HIRED FARM WORKING FORCE OF 1957  
A PROGRESS REPORT

by

Dorothy Anne Fisher



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
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Nearly 4 million persons worked on farms for wages at some time during 1957, about 10 percent more than in 1956. Most of the increase was in the number of those who did less than 25 days of farm wage work, young people aged 14 to 17, and men who did 25 days or more of farm wage work. About 2,200,000 persons did 25 days or more of farm wage work during the year (tables 1, 2, and 3).

Changes in composition of the hired farm working force

In most years since 1945 persons doing 25 days or more of farm wage work during the year have comprised about two-thirds of the total farm work force. The proportions dropped to 58 percent in 1956 and 56 percent in 1957 because of the relatively greater increases during those years in the numbers of persons who worked less than 25 days on farms for wages. Since these two groups differ widely in experience, earnings, and general characteristics as well as in degree of their attachment to the agricultural labor force, it is customary to consider them separately.

T Persons who did 25 days or more of farm wage work

The ratio of males to females remained about 3 to 1 in 1957 as in 1956, despite the fact that most of the 1957 increase in numbers of workers who did 25 days or more of farm wage work were men. From 1945 to 1954 the ratio had been fairly stable at about 4 to 1 (table 2).

During most previous years the age composition of the hired farm work force remained fairly stable. About 80 percent of both sexes were in the age group 18 through 64, but a smaller proportion of females than males was found in the 65 and over age group. In 1957 the proportion of both men and women in the 18 to 64 age group had declined, while the proportion of younger persons aged 14 to 17 increased to over a fifth of both the men and the women in the hired farm work force (table 3).

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1/ This report, based on information obtained for the Agricultural Marketing Service by the U. S. Bureau of the Census in the Current Population Survey of February 1958, was prepared in the Agricultural Economics Division, Farm Population and Rural Life Branch, under the direction of Sheridan T. Maitland and Margaret Jarman Hagood. A final report, including findings on special questions asked for the first time in the 1957 survey, is in preparation.

Table 1.--Farm wage workers who did any farm wage work during the year, by sex, United States, 1945-57

Year:	All farm wage workers			Workers doing 25 days or more of farm wage work during the year			Workers doing less than 25 days of farm wage work during the year		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1945:	3,212	2,375	837	1,965	1,576	389	1,247	799	448
1946:	2,770	2,120	650	1,953	1,584	369	817	536	281
1947:	3,394	2,587	807	2,215	1,864	351	1,179	723	456
1948:	3,752	2,820	932	2,502	2,036	466	1,250	784	466
1949:	4,140	3,021	1,119	2,510	2,001	509	1,630	1,020	610
1950:	4,342	3,221	1,121	-	-	-	-	-	-
1951:	3,274	2,392	882	2,156	1,718	438	1,118	674	444
1952:	2,980	2,218	762	1,972	1,558	414	1,008	660	348
1954:	3,009	2,237	772	1,908	1,544	364	1,101	693	408
1956:	3,575	2,525	1,050	2,078	1,553	525	1,497	972	525
1957:	3,962	2,765	1,197	2,200	1,673	527	1,762	1,092	670

All data on the hired farm working force from the Current Population Survey relate to persons 14 years of age and over in the civilian noninstitutional population at or near the end of the year.

Table 2.--Farm wage workers doing 25 or more days of farm wage work  
 in the year, by sex, United States,  
 1945-49, 1951, 1952, 1954, 1956, and 1957

Table 3.--Percentage distribution of male and female workers who did 25 days or more of hired farm work, by age groups, United States, 1952, 1954, 1956, and 1957

Age	Male				Female			
	1952	1954	1956	1957	1952	1954	1956	1957
	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
14-17 years	17	14	17	22	18	19	18	21
18-34	42	41	39	38	37	44	39	32
35-64	37	41	39	35	44	36	41	45
65 and over	4	4	5	5	1	1	2	2

The "regular" hired farm working force--workers who spend 150 days (about 6 months) or more at farm wage work--comprised less than a third of all workers reporting 25 days or more of work on farms for pay in 1957 (table 4).

Table 4.--Distribution of farm wage workers doing 25 days or more of farm wage work, by duration of farm wage work during the year, United States, 1945-49, 1951, 1952, 1954, 1956, and 1957

#### Chief activity during the year

The number of farm wage workers who spent the greater part of their time in 1957 doing farm wage work--two-fifths of the total--was the lowest recorded since this series began in 1945. The decrease occurred both among those who supplemented their farm wage earnings with nonfarm work and those who did not (table 5). The number who were chiefly engaged in farm work other than wage work in 1957 (farm operation or unpaid family work) was greater than it had been since 1951. The over-all result was a reduction in the proportion chiefly engaged in farm work from about three-fifths in 1954 and 1956 to just over one-half of the hired farm working force in 1957.

The number of persons who did 25 days or more of farm wage work but who did nonfarm work the greater part of the year also reached a new low in 1957 of only 7 percent of the hired farm working force, reflecting the downturn in business activity which began in the third quarter (table 5).

Over two-fifths of the 1957 hired farm working force were not in the labor force during the greater part of the year--considerably more than had been reported in this series since 1945. Part of the increase consisted of young people who attended school most of the year; the remainder were people chiefly engaged in other activities. Included in the latter group are people who spent most of their time looking for work. There were more of these reported in 1957 than in any previous year since 1945. The number of women whose chief activity was keeping house was lower in 1957 than in 1956. In 1956 there had been a notable upsurge of women in the hired farm working force.

#### Employment and earnings of hired farm workers

At farm work. Farm wage workers who worked at least 25 days averaged 125 days of farm wage work in 1957, the lowest average reported since 1945. The decline in duration of farm wage work affected both men and women.

Average farm wage rates, which had shown a steady increase since 1947 remained almost the same in 1957 as in 1956 at \$5.90 per day. Males averaged \$6.25 per day in 1957, about the same as in 1956. Average daily wages of women declined from \$3.75 to \$3.50 between 1956 and 1957.

Working fewer days at about the same wages as in 1956, hired farm workers averaged \$738 in farm wage earnings in 1957, compared with \$799 in 1956. The average male earned \$78 less in 1957 than in 1956, and the average female earned \$39 less.

At nonfarm work. Average days of nonfarm work by persons who did 25 days or more of farm wage work also fell to a new low in 1957. The average was 19 days in 1957 and 23 in 1956. Both men and women worked fewer days on nonfarm jobs in 1957 than in 1956.

Table 5.--Distribution of farm wage workers doing 25 days or more of farm wage work in the year, by chief activity during the year, United States, 1947, 1949, 1951, 1952, 1954, 1956, and 1957

Chief activity of workers during year	Farm wage workers						
	1947	1949	1951	1952	1954	1956	1957
	Thou.	Thou.	Thou.	Thou.	Thou.	Thou.	Thou.
Total	2,215	2,510	2,156	1,972	1,908	2,078	2,200
Farm work	1,563	1,622	1,292	1,078	1,166	1,223	1,149
Farm wage work	1,325	1,262	981	884	979	1,028	903
Without nonfarm work	1,014	978	768	674	759	825	749
With nonfarm work	311	284	213	210	220	203	154
Other farm work	238	360	311	194	187	195	246
Nonfarm work	245	252	245	222	173	160	158
Not in the labor force or unemployed	407	636	619	672	569	595	893
Keeping house	128	299	267	288	205	286	267
Attending school	195	258	287	284	243	314	431
Unemployed and other	84	79	1/65	1/100	1/121	1/95	1/195
Percentage distribution							
	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Farm work	71	65	60	55	61	59	52
Farm wage work	60	50	46	45	51	50	41
Without nonfarm work	46	39	36	34	40	40	34
With nonfarm work	14	11	10	11	11	10	7
Other farm work	11	15	14	10	10	9	11
Nonfarm work	11	10	11	11	9	8	7
Not in the labor force or unemployed	18	25	29	34	30	33	41
Keeping house	5	12	13	15	11	14	12
Attending school	9	10	13	14	13	15	20
Unemployed and other	4	3	3	5	6	4	9

1/ Includes for 1951, 8,000, for 1952, 18,000, for 1954, 49,000, for 1956, 22,000 and for 1957, 74,000 persons who reported looking for work was their chief activity. The comparable figures for 1947 and 1949 not available.

Average nonfarm wages dropped from \$8.30 per day in 1956 to \$7.95 in 1957. Men earned less, per day worked, at nonfarm jobs--\$8.55 in 1957 and \$9.05 in 1956, but women earned more--\$3.50 per day in 1957 and \$3.35 in 1956. However, annual nonfarm wage earnings declined for both groups. The average for both groups was \$154 in 1957--the lowest nonfarm wage earnings reported since 1949 (table 6).

Total wage income of hired farm workers. The average farm wage worker worked 15 fewer days and had \$97 less income in 1957 than in 1956 (table 6). The total average annual income of \$892 was not only lower than the peak income in 1956, but it was also lower than the total wage earnings of farm wage workers in 1954 and in 1952.

#### Migratory farm workers

Seasonal requirements for harvest labor often exceed the local labor supply. The need is met by migratory workers who leave their homes temporarily to work at cultivating or harvesting crops in another county, or other counties. 2/ There were about 427,000 migratory workers in the 1957 hired farm working force. This was the same number as in 1956, but the ratio of males to females was lower in 1957 (table 7).

In 1957, for the first time since 1952, total annual wage earnings of migratory workers were lower than those of nonmigratory workers (table 8). The difference had been the greater nonfarm wage earnings of migratory workers, but in 1957 the average migratory worker earned only \$114 in nonfarm wages as compared to \$243 in 1956. Nonmigratory workers experienced a much smaller decline in nonfarm wage income, earning \$161 in 1957 as compared to \$182 in 1956. Migratory workers had a greater decline in number of days worked at nonfarm jobs than nonmigratory workers and earned only \$7.25 per day worked in 1957 compared to \$9.15 in 1956, while nonmigrants earned \$8.05 per day worked in 1957, about the same as in 1956.

Migratory workers also experienced a more severe decline in their farm wage income between 1956 and 1957 than did nonmigrants. While they worked approximately the same number of days on farms, they earned only \$6.45 per day worked in 1957 compared with \$8.05 in 1956. Hence their average farm earnings were \$745--\$190 less than in 1956. Nonmigrants worked fewer days on farms, but their average daily farm wages rose from \$5.55 to \$5.80 between 1956 and 1957, and their average annual farm wage earnings declined to \$737--only \$39 less than in 1956.

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2/ Workers who commuted daily across a county line to do farm wage work and persons who made a more or less permanent move to take a steady farm job in another county are not considered migratory farm workers. Farm wage workers who had no usual place of residence (no regular home, no regular living quarters elsewhere) were considered as migratory if they did farm wage work in two or more counties in 1957.

Table 6.--Average days worked and wages earned at farm and nonfarm wage work by farm workers doing 25 days or more of farm wage work, by sex, United States, 1956 and 1957

Year and sex	Farm and nonfarm			Farm			Nonfarm		
	Days worked	Wages earned	Days worked	Per year	Per day	Days worked	Per year	Per day	
	Number	Dollars	Number	Dollars	Dollars	Number	Dollars	Dollars	
1956									
Total	159	989	136	799	5.85	23	190	8.30	
Male	184	1,215	157	974	6.20	27	241	9.05	
Female	86	320	74	279	3.75	12	41	3.35	
1957									
Total	144	892	125	738	5.90	19	154	7.95	
Male	165	1,087	143	896	6.25	22	191	8.55	
Female	78	275	68	240	3.50	10	35	3.60	

1/ Rounded to the nearest 5 cents.

Table 7.--Number of persons who did any work as migratory farm workers, by sex, United States, 1949, 1950, 1952, 1954, 1956, and 1957 1/

Sex	1949	1950	1952	1954	1956	1957
	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands
Total	422	403	352	365	427	427
Male	291	285	234	273	314	306
Female	131	118	118	92	113	121

1/ For definition of migratory farm workers and coverage of survey, see text, page 6.

Table 8.--Average days worked and wages earned at farm and nonfarm wage work by workers doing 25 days or more of farm wage work, by migratory status and sex of worker, United States, 1956 and 1957

Year, migratory status and sex	Farm and nonfarm			Farm			Nonfarm		
	Days worked	Wages earned	Days worked	Wages earned	Days worked	Wages earned	Days worked	Wages earned	Days worked
	Days worked	Per year: day 1/ worked	Days worked	Per year: day 1/ worked	Days worked	Per year: day 1/ worked	Days worked	Per year: day 1/ worked	Days worked
	No.	Dol.	No.	Dol.	No.	Dol.	No.	Dol.	Dol.
1956									
Migratory	143	1,178	8.25	116	935	8.05	27	243	9.15
Male	157	1,369	8.70	126	1,069	8.50	31	300	9.55
Female	91	500	5.55	81	458	5.70	10	42	4.35
Nonmigratory	162	958	5.90	140	776	5.55	22	182	8.10
Male	189	1,188	6.30	163	958	5.90	26	230	8.95
Female	86	295	3.40	73	254	3.45	13	41	3.25
1957									
Migratory	131	859	6.55	115	745	6.45	16	114	7.25
Male	148	1,045	7.05	129	900	7.00	19	145	7.55
Female	80	304	3.80	75	280	3.75	5	24	4.45
Nonmigratory	147	898	6.15	127	737	5.80	20	161	8.05
Male	168	1,095	6.50	145	895	6.15	23	200	8.70
Female	78	270	3.50	67	233	3.45	11	37	3.55

1/ Rounded to the nearest 5 cents.

The over-all result was that total farm and nonfarm wage income of the average migratory worker declined from \$1,178 in 1956 to \$859 in 1957. Total farm and nonfarm cash wage income of nonmigrants averaged \$958 in 1956 and \$898 in 1957.

#### Regional differences in employment and earnings of farm wage workers

Information on regional differences in employment and earnings of farm wage workers obtained for the first time for 1957 indicated that more than half the people in the 1957 hired farm working force were living in the South at the time of the survey, in February 1958. About a fifth were living in the Western States and almost that many were in the North Central States. Less than one-tenth were living in the Northeast. Hired farm workers in the South had the shortest

duration of work and the lowest wage rates, both for farm and nonfarm wage work. Workers in the West had the highest wage rates both for farm and nonfarm work, and spent the most time at nonfarm wage work. Hired farm workers living in the Northeast put in the greatest amount of time at farm wage work. Number of workers and average cash earnings by region are shown in table 9.

Persons who did less than 25 days of farm wage work in 1957

About 1.8 million persons, 44 percent of the 1957 hired farm working force, spent less than 25 days working on farms for wages in 1957. This is the largest number of such workers in any year since 1945 (table 1). An indication of the usual activity of farm workers during most of the year is provided by the employment status of workers who did less than 25 days of farm wage work. Fewer than 50,000 persons who worked less than 25 days on farms for wages during 1957 were employed at farm wage work at the time of the survey in February 1958 (table 10). About a fifth of these persons were farm operators and 16 percent were employed in nonagricultural industries. The importance of housewives and children in the short-term seasonal farm work force is indicated by the fact that half of all persons who did less than 25 days of farm wage work in 1957 were not in the labor force in February 1958. Most of these were keeping house or attending school.

The effect of the 1957 recession is indicated by the decline from the previous year in the proportion of short-term seasonal farm workers employed in nonagricultural industries at the time of the survey. The net change in employment status was accounted for by an increased proportion unemployed or out of the labor force, rather than by their usual shift from agricultural to nonagricultural employment. Note also that while the proportion of these short-term seasonal workers who were employed in agriculture at the time of survey remained about the same, the proportion employed in agriculture decreased among those doing 25 days or more of farm wage work during the year (table 10).

Table 9.—Farm wage workers who did 25 days or more of farm wage work, average days worked and wages earned at farm and nonfarm wage work, by region, color and sex of worker, United States, 1957

Region, color, and sex of worker	Farm and nonfarm						Farm						Nonfarm					
	Number of workers		Wages earned		Days worked													
	Days worked	Per year	Per day 1/ worked															
Total	2,200	144	892	6.20	125	738	5.90	19	154	7.95								
White	1,487	154	1,071	6.95	133	877	6.60	21	194	9.05								
Male	1,237	171	1,225	7.20	146	997	6.85	25	228	9.30								
Female	250	76	311	4.05	70	281	4.00	6	30	4.60								
Nonwhite	713	123	519	4.20	108	450	4.15	15	69	4.70								
Male	436	151	695	4.60	135	607	4.50	16	88	5.45								
Female	277	80	244	3.05	67	204	3.05	13	40	3.15								
Northeast	155	202	1,225	6.05	186	1,062	5.70	16	163	10.05								
White	146	203	1,238	6.05	187	1,073	5.75	16	165	10.00								
Nonwhite	9	169	1,010	5.95	158	883	5.60	11	127	11.15								
North Central	388	156	978	6.30	131	785	6.00	25	193	7.85								
White	371	157	1,002	6.40	131	801	6.10	26	201	7.85								
Nonwhite	17	127	477	3.75	124	451	3.65	3	26	9.70								
South	1,195	127	607	4.80	111	525	4.75	16	82	5.30								
White	560	136	795	5.85	118	677	5.75	18	118	6.40								
Nonwhite	635	118	443	3.75	105	392	3.70	13	51	3.90								
West	462	161	1,446	9.00	135	1,143	8.45	26	303	11.80								
White	410	160	1,454	9.10	136	1,150	8.45	24	304	12.75								
Nonwhite	52	170	1,384	8.15	130	1,087	8.35	40	297	7.40								

<sup>1</sup> Rounded to the nearest 5 cents.

Table 10.--Percentage distribution of persons doing farm wage work in 1956 and 1957 showing duration of farm wage work during the year by employment status at time of survey 1/

Employment status at time of survey <u>1/</u>	Persons doing less than 25 days of farm wage work		Persons doing 25 days or more of farm wage work	
	1956	1957	1956	1957
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Total	100	100	100	100
Employed in agriculture	27	26	48	40
Wage and salary workers	5	3	42	32
Self-employed workers	20	20	5	7
Unpaid family workers	2	33	1	1
Employed in nonagricultural industries	22	16	16	14
Manufacturing	4	4	4	2
Forestry, fishing, mining or construction	3	2	2	2
Transportation, communication and other public utilities	1	2	2	2
Trade	6	3	3	4
Private households	4	3	2	2
Other	4	2	3	2
Unemployed	5	8	7	11
Not in the labor force	46	50	29	35
Keeping house	18	20	13	11
Attending school	23	24	11	15
Other	5	6	5	9

1/ The survey of the 1956 hired farm working force was taken in December 1956 and the survey of the 1957 hired farm working force was taken in February 1958.





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